

VZCZCXRO0103
OO RUEHDE
DE RUEHKU #1673/01 1301538
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 101538Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4399
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001673

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: CABINET APPROVES TEN
CONSTITUENCIES; PM ACCEPTS MINISTER'S RESIGNATION

REF: KUWAIT 1642 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary and comment: On May 9, the Cabinet approved a draft law to reduce the number of electoral constituencies from 25 to ten. Information Minister Dr. Anas Al-Rashaid, a liberal who supports five constituencies, resigned in protest of the draft law and a related proposal (not approved) to amend the Constitution to increase the number of members of Parliament (MPs) to 60. Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah accepted Dr. Anas' resignation, and Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Sabah was appointed acting Information Minister. According to a top GOK official, the constitutional amendment proposal has been "postponed." Parliament is scheduled to discuss the draft law on May 15 in what is likely to be a contentious session. Even if MPs agree to the Government's proposal, there may still be considerable disagreement over the geographic distribution of the ten constituencies, a politically sensitive issue. Although somewhat disappointed by the Government's choice of ten constituencies, most Kuwaitis we talked to seemed to accept it as the most politically viable option and a step toward genuine reform. In addition, despite speculation, it appears unlikely that other Ministers will follow Dr. Anas' example and submit their resignations. Our contacts also largely dismissed rumors that if there is an impasse over the reform the Amir might dissolve Parliament, a constitutionally legal procedure as long as elections are held within two months of the dissolution. End summary and comment.

Mixed Reaction to Government Proposal

12. (SBU) After six consecutive days of meeting to discuss electoral reform, the Cabinet voted May 9 to support a reduction in the number of electoral constituencies from 25 to ten. Kuwaitis expressed mixed reaction to the Government's proposal, which is reportedly almost identical to a reduction plan previously submitted by the Government and tabled by Parliament in 2004. Most proponents of democratic reform as well as the ad hoc ministerial committee studying electoral reform had called for five constituencies, arguing that fewer and larger electoral constituencies would promote greater transparency, prevent corrupt electoral practices, and force candidates to campaign on more broad-based political issues. Women's activist Dr. Rola Dashti, who is a potential candidate for the 2007 parliamentary elections, alleged gerrymandering could limit the possibility of women being elected to Parliament. Another women's activist, Fatima Al-Abdali, echoed this view and lauded Dr. Anas' decision to resign in protest. Other women's activists similarly praised Dr. Anas and argued that five constituencies would best serve Kuwait.

13. (SBU) Abdel Amir Al-Nasser, the Chairman of the Kuwait

Future Society, a Shi'a NGO, was angered by the Government's proposal, which he believed was unfairly biased against Kuwait's Shi'a community, approximately one third of Kuwait's one million citizens. "Where is the justice in having one constituency with 50,000 people and another with 16,000," Al-Nasser asked, referring to reported demographic inequities in the proposed constituencies. Ahmad Dhafeeri, a columnist in the English-language daily Arab Times, called the decision "embarrassing." Ahmed Deyain, a columnist for the Arabic-daily Al-Rai Al-Aam, argued that the Government did not want any reduction, but chose to support ten constituencies due to popular pressure and Dr. Anas' resignation. Deputy National Assembly Speaker Mishari Al-Anjari, who supports five constituencies, argued that there was "not that much difference" between the five and ten constituency proposals, and predicted Parliament would approve ten constituencies on May 15. He did not believe there would be any "ramifications" from Dr. Anas' resignation since the Cabinet had quickly approved the ten constituency proposal.

14. (C) Issam Al-Dabbous, a Government-leaning MP who strongly opposes the reduction, told Poloff he had first proposed increasing the number of MPs to 60 as a diversionary tactic to bloc approval of the five constituency proposal. Asked why he opposed the reform, he responded that Kuwait was "run by money" and corruption, and would never change. He added that liberals and Islamists in Kuwait wanted the reform as the first step toward a true constitutional monarchy with political parties and a rotation of power in Parliament. Al-Dabbous claimed elements of the ruling Al-Sabah family feared losing their power and influence if the reform was adopted. He predicted the May 15 session would be adjourned due to heated debate over the Government's ten constituency

KUWAIT 00001673 002 OF 002

proposal.

For more reporting from Embassy Kuwait, visit:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable s>

Visit Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

LEBARON